wordeater
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Issue No. 109

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THE MORNING WALK

Tricia Mucklow

I pull on my blue hooded sweatshirt that smells like bonfire.
I double knot my old Nike tennis shoes,
And then I walk outside into the chilly early morning.
The sun is almost an hour from waking.

With each crunch of my footstep,
I can hear a frightened frenzy scurry away
Underneath the dense and thick brush.
I can feel hundreds of eyes following my every move.

The weeping willow tree's long, outstretched branches
Whistle in the wind, and it appears that they are reaching
Out to pull me into their private chambers.
So I quicken my step.

Now the sun is starting to rise
Flooding the forest with a brilliant light
Of red orange and yellow and pink.
The light rays cast tall shadows from the trees.

When I walk, I always think
About anything and everything that comes to mind.
I always seem to think more clearly at this time of day.
The tranquility and the beauty of this place always puts my mind at ease.

A squirrel runs across my path.
He waits at the edge, clutching his acorn, and watches me intently.
He runs up the tree once I get two feet away.
He stops at the first branch and sits down and looks at me.

There is a light fog that clings to the trees.
I can hear the noisy birds chirp out with constant chatter,
From way on top of the tall treetops.
Through the small clearing, I can see my proud yellow house.

LOVE OF MOVEMENT

Joe Jensen

I'm sick of this
everyday life.
It doesn't stop.
I step out of my house and hit the street
To get that feeling that I crave.
To walk out in faith and risk everything, just to let go of life for just a few hours.
I let my love of movement take me where I go. That groove of just riding the streets and hitting tricks wherever you can.
The feeling of finding a new spot, even when I'm driving to work.
My eyes scan for new places to go.
Stairs there, a rail here.

If you put your mind to it and cast out fear, then you can skate anything!
All I need are a couple of curbs and some good pavement,
Just to feel the road and do tricks that I love.
I don't need to do big tricks,
I just need to get that feeling of exploration.

It is an awesome feeling to know the world around me in this intimate way.
Instead of seeing my surroundings as cold and static structures,
I see it as an explosion of life and possibility.
The modern world is my playground.
If humans have littered this earth with concrete and asphalt,
I am going to skate all over it.
Forests are cut down to make way for roads and buildings.
What a bunch of crap.
I'm going to skate the streets raw.

In America, we are too concerned with money.
No one stops to enjoy the beautiful things in life.
A tree is a beautiful thing, but people cut them down all the time.
I think that concrete is ugly, but it is useful.
Just because I find new beauty in it doesn't make me a vandal.

The world is choking on work and unreachable dreams.
I'm talking simplicity.
I'm saying enjoy the little things.
It's the only way to stay sane in this world.
Don't let yourself get swept up by the changing world —
Change the world. Make it yours.

I skate to get a new perspective on life —
To feel the world around me in a new way.
The world becomes abstracted and new.
My senses open up and flood me with feeling.

If I skated to do big tricks,
Then I have defeated my purpose for skating.
Big tricks impress people,
But I'm not skating for them.

Skating is my own.
It is something I share with Jesus.
When I skate, my mind is freed.
I lose myself.

FOUND POEM: COLERIDGE ON URINE[1]

Bill Yarrow

What a beautiful Thing
Urine is,
in a Pot,
brown, yellow,
transpicuous, the Image,
diamond shaped
of the Candle in it,
especially, as it now
appeared,
I having emptied the Snuffers
into it & the Snuff
floating about, & painting
all-shaped Shadows
on the Bottom.

[1]Coleridge Notebook I, #1766, 16.152.

APRIL FOOLS!

Brenda McCracken

Toilet looks germy.
Floor looks pissy.
Shower looks scummy.
Fourteen days 'til tax time.

Weeds need pulling.
Lawn needs mowing.
Trees need trimming.
Thirteen days 'til tax time.

Car needs oil.
House needs paint.
Softener needs salt.
Twelve days 'til tax time.

Kid needs an ear.
School needs an eye.
Neighbor needs a hand.
Eleven days 'til tax time.

Work takes ten hours.
Home begs eight.
Sleep steals six.
Ten days 'til tax time.

Sink's clogged.
Freezer's warm.
Cupboard's bare.
Nine days 'til tax time.

Furniture needs waxing.
Carpet needs vacuuming.
Windows need washing.
Eight days 'til tax time.

Dog wants a treat.
Kid wants a snack.
Spouse wants sex.
Seven days 'til tax time.

Dishes piling up.
Laundry piling up.
Dog dirt piling up.
Six days 'til tax time.

Trash needs bagging.
Mortgage needs paying.
Supper needs sauteing.
Five days 'til tax time.

PTO wants cookies.
Church wants cakes.
Kid wants brownies.
Four days 'til tax time.

Dog has a limp.
Kid has a cough.
Spouse has an ache.
Three days 'til tax time.

Nails need trimming.
Hair needs coloring.
Legs need shaving.
Two days 'til tax time.

Find the receipts!
Find the W-2's!
Find the forms!
One day 'til tax time!

Gotta be born.
Gotta pay taxes.
Gotta die.
Twenty-four hours 'til tax time!

DISTRACTIONS

Jesse Cohoon

Distractions — they are everywhere. There is nowhere to hide!
Where can I flee? Where can I hide to be safe from them?
Sights, sounds, scents, sensations, and savors
These are the things that make up life

Without them life would be dull, meaningless.
Distractions — they are everywhere. There is nowhere to hide!
I am overwhelmed, drowning in the cacophony of
Sights, sounds, scents, sensations, and savors

It is weakness to embrace them, yet embrace them I must because
Without them life would be dull, meaningless.
I must fight the flood, struggle against the surge lest
I am overwhelmed, drowning in the cacophony of

Sights, sounds, scents, sensations, and savors.
It is weakness to embrace them, yet embrace them I must because
These are the things that make up life
They are sounds of

Click, clack, crick, crack, thrap.
Sights, sounds, scents, sensations, and savors
Dazzling light, blinding speed, and graceful movements
These are the things that make up life.

Smells of cooking, rain, and skunk
Click, clack, crick, crack, thrap.
Hot, cold, itch, pressure and pain
Dazzling light, graceful movements, and blinding speed

These are all things that distract.
Smells of cooking, rain, and skunk
Light and dark, click, clack, crick, crack, thrap.
Hot, cold, itch, pressure and pain

SLOWLY ATTEMPTING TO DISLODGE A SPIDER

Marissa Frattini

With closed eyes
And shaky palms,
I raise my flushed face to the mirror in the dimly lit bathroom,
Still feeling the stickiness of the evening clinging to me.

I see those floating dots —
Deep oceanic blues, fluorescent greens, and glowing marigold-inspired yellows —
The ones that appear when you squint with your eyes closed so very tight,
And then push at your eye sockets until you're dizzy —
Like you used to when you were young,
And your mom told you how it would make you go blind if you didn't stop.
So one by one,
I remove the remains of
    Nature's evidence from my disheveled hair and rumpled clothing —
Leaf by crunchy leaf,
    Moist blades of grass,
        dingy yellowed cigarette butts
            pieces of blue string, origin unknown;
Taking painstaking care not disturb the sleeping dead:
A spider who burrowed his way beneath my barrette.
I couldn't help but feel strangely apologetic,
    yet violated in a humorous sort of way.
I stretch,
    crackling all those tense, knotted muscles of my back and shoulders.
Then place my new companion carefully
    onto the pale yellow porcelain of the bathroom sink beside me.
He looks at me from beneath lowered eyelids,
    Sadly lowers his head
        as if he understands my desperate need for silence and slumber,
            the confusion that lingers after passion and heat.
He cocks his head toward my bedroom door
    and dismisses me for the evening.
"Tomorrow is going to be a long day, my dear,"
    he whispers,
        "Just like all of your yesterdays and all of the tomorrows to come."

CHARLIE'S LIFE

Bonnie Kodrick

Charlie kicked his way up the dirt road which held memories of the gravel delivered six years ago by the Breckinridge County truck. The toe of his heavy boot was deeply scarred, the heavy-bladed farm equipment having riddled the leather with near-miss cuts. The second-grade rocks protruded sharply into his eighth-grade world, seemingly smaller every year as his lengthening legs sent him farther and farther away from the jagged edges. He carried not books, for he had already read most of the material after he had awakened at night from dreams that were more disturbances than fantasies. He absorbed books, replacing fright with knowledge bestowed upon him by old masters from pencil-marked pages.

Charlie passed Mr. Allen's house, rounding the curve which marked the homestretch track of dirt. This was the starting line for his daily race against himself, and he waved carelessly to Mrs. Allen as he geared his body for the effort. There were no rock-memories to trip him on this stretch, for the clay driveway was beaten into hard submission years ago. A yellow sheen had replaced the soft golden powder years before Charlie had come to live with his aunt and uncle. The old Ford tractors and lumbering Packards had buried one another's tracks as they drove slowly toward the tar-papered house. The tin roof would sometimes catch a few rays from the sun setting behind Mr. Allen's house, and the light would bounce into the locust trees, accenting the rickety front porch. Charlie loved the welcome of the front porch, savoring the sounds which greeted him as he jumped through the gate, crossing the finish line. Some days he ran as though chased by the snakes which slinked across the road; other days, his legs were weighted down by the weariness given him by the previous long-day's work.

"Hello!" Charlie shouted at the seat-spent couch which stood opposite the front door. "Hello! Aunt Jewell? Uncle Leo? I'm here! Hello?"

"Home so soon?" Aunt Jewell said as she came through the doorway which opened into the back kitchen. She was a short, round little woman with hair the color of dull aluminum and skin the color and texture of an old terra cotta pot, its surface cracked and weathered into deep crevices. Her thin lips framed few teeth, and those that remained were worn and discolored by fifty years of use. Her sliced eyes gave little indication of their color although Charlie always got an impression of black when he looked into them.

"Good," Aunt Jewell continued, "Leo can use your help with the drain tiles leading away from the field by Henry's house because he needs to finish today. Get out of your school clothes, and I'll get you something to eat before you leave." She never looked at Charlie when she spoke to him, always too busy wiping her hands into her apron or glancing around the room as though looking for work to do. No need to show her the report card then — he would wait until she would take the time to sign it.

Charlie walked through the kitchen, passing the metal table and chairs which stood beside the doorway leading to the small, added-on bedroom where he slept. He sighed as he turned the battered doorknob, preparing himself to work well into the night by the light cast from two dented kerosene lanterns. He was glad that it was Friday — at least he wouldn't have to struggle to keep his weary self awake in class tomorrow.

Charlie closed the door behind him and flopped down onto the bed. It squeaked a greeting to him as it promised future sleep but not necessarily rest. He stared at the faded paper on the ceiling, wondering why Aunt Jewell insisted upon papering the ceiling instead of painting it. Were there flaws and imperfections under the white-on-white swirls, or did Aunt Jewell simply wish to design a view for Charlie? The room had Charlie's smell in the walls, and he breathed deeply as he tried to replenish himself before he found his shabby work clothes. He raised his arms to the ceiling gods, reaching for the bare 40-watt bulb which dotted the lid of

his room. Sometimes Charlie wondered if the insufficient light was the reason for so many of his headaches. But no matter, he knew that he had better get "up and at 'em" before Aunt Jewell caught him "being lazy," as she like to call his rest.

After changing, Charlie went back into the kitchen and sat down at the small table to eat the bologna sandwich his aunt had left for him. He had no idea where she went — it seemed she usually managed to disappear after Charlie came home. The sandwich would have tasted better if Aunt Jewell had fried the bologna, but at least he would not have to be hungry as he and his uncle worked into the night.

Uncle Leo was bent over a piece of the red field tile as Charlie walked toward him. His uncle was a huge, dark man with hanging ears and a nose which commanded his entire face. He wore no shirt under his overalls, and his brimmed straw hat was frayed and stained with sweat. His large, callused hands remembered years of sharecropper's labor, and his eyes had been plowed under with sadness as his smile had been whittled away by poverty and the sharp knife of worry.

Charlie's arrival was acknowledged by a slight jerk of Uncle Leo's head as he pointed toward the opposite end of the field tile. Charlie walked around to position himself spread-eagled on top of the straight row of connected drainage tiles. His bare hands seized the tile, twisting and turning it in order to fit the smaller end into the gaping, already positioned tile row. Charlie's and his uncle's movements had become synchronized over the past six years, so the work went smoothly and did not require much use of the light from the lanterns.

After the last tile had been buried, Uncle Leo jerked his head in the direction of the house. They loaded the tools into the wheelbarrow and trudged slowly home to be greeted by cold fried chicken and biscuits placed on the table waiting for them. Aunt Jewell had retreated to her bedroom to piece her quilts or stuff her dolls. She made up the patterns for her quilts and drew faces on the dolls she crafted from the left-over scraps of material. She sold the crafts at the flea market, using the money to buy more supplies to make more quilts and dolls.

Charlie and his uncle ate in silence, their bodies hungry from the hard labor. Uncle Leo had no table manners, probably resulting from the years of lonely, midnight meals at the kitchen table. He leaned so far over his plate that neither his face nor his mouth was visible. All that Charlie could see was his uncle's thinning, gray hair. No wrinkles had grooved their way between the sparse strands on the top of Uncle Leo's head, but the hand which shoveled the food into his mouth was spotted, the skin folded deeply over itself. Arthritis had started to distort the fingers, and Charlie found himself wondering if the pain of the disfigurement bothered his uncle.

Heaving himself up from the chair, Uncle Leo nodded to Charlie and left the room. Charlie soon heard water being poured into the old bathtub, and he realized that his uncle would be relaxing in the tepid water for a long time.

Charlie went out onto the front porch, shocking his eyes with the darkness which was hung with a speckling of stars. He sat in the warped swing suspended from two large eye-hooks screwed into the weathered old beam. Charlie liked the night sounds which surrounded him, and he could finally distinguish the tree frog's call from the cicada's shrill vibration. There was an occasional swishing of air as a bat found its way home to Mr. Allen's barn. A cow would sometimes add a lament to the night creatures' symphony, and a disoriented rooster would infrequently begin a startled wake-up call. Charlie was aware of the late-summer rustling of crops which had ripened in the surrounding fields, and he wondered if he would miss school again this year when it was time to harvest the inflexible yellow ears with brown hair dying from the tops.

Charlie stretched out his long legs, disturbing the old dog that had drifted into sleep after wandering onto the porch. "Well, hello, ol' dog. Did I interrupt a rabbit chase? Or do you welcome disturbance from visions of snake-headed hares?" Charlie questioned Ralph as he reached out his hand to the old dog. "Come here, Ralph, and I'll pat the other world away."

The old dog rose slowly — the years of chasing rabbits and fording streams had left stiffening reminders in his joints. His black coat was barely visible as he wobbled up to Charlie and laid his head on Charlie's thigh. Charlie bent slightly toward Ralph, reaching to touch the grateful old head. Ralph had received many of Charlie's words with tail-wags, even those sad words which protested unfairly.

Charlie often longed for a brother or sister — someone with whom to share the loss of his parents. Aunt Jewell and Uncle Leo had given him shelter and food, but he was lonely for goofing-off laughter and dark-night ghost stories. He told Ralph about a brother who would have been called Joe and a sister who would have been called Mary. The three of them would have built castles in cornfields and defeated dragons in dark domains. Charlie would have had opponents as he raced his way home, laughingly teasing Joe at his side or gently encouraging Mary from over his shoulder. Joe would have taken the monotony from the work, replacing some of the drudgery with light-hearted prattle. Mary might have shared in releasing Aunt Jewell from the solitary confinement of her work.

Charlie was brought back from his wish-world by the harsh sound which signaled the opening of the neglected screen door. Uncle Leo stood hanging from the frame, braced against the jamb by one hand while leaning on the crossbar with the other. Outlined by the dim light from the living room, his bulk seemed even larger to Charlie. As Charlie looked up from the porch swing, he knew without seeing that Uncle Leo had jerked his head in acknowledgement, sighing deeply to release the weariness of the day from his body. Uncle Leo seemed to be waiting for something, but Charlie would never know what it was. The silence hung between them, framed by the night-air noises. Charlie looked back down at Ralph and resumed stroking the old dog's head, his mind now empty of its wishes.

KURTZ LUCID

Ted Thompson

One midnight on Eel River
The moonglow seemed so bright
I could not cloak my lurid acts
In the moiré mists of night.

Next day while noon was brilliant
Inside her cottage dim
I hid in the pale obscurity
And pursued my shabby whim.

Between the light and dark
Each draws his own low line.
We don't leave that distinction
For others to define.

Just so for those abstractions
Light-dark can represent.
If we don't see our darkling selves
We never shall repent.

THE NATURE OF WISDOM

Andy Neill

i studied biology and never really knew what i was getting into.

study a subject long enough and it reveals itself slowly, subtly and in unusual ways.

scientists are supposed to remain objective and unbiased, reject the subjective.

i can't help myself, i'm human. after all i am a subject of the landscape and i see subjective beauty all around, i admire it. i adore it. i love the earth and the diverse secrets it conceals.

i see inspirational parallelisms in nature that others see in religion, literature or poetry.

according to science, i merely get distracted by the misleading analogies cluttering the taxonomy, yet i am drawn to it like Picasso or Apis to the nectar.

here is what i've learned to love about nature and life and why i am who i am...

...there are divisions among the cells as in people. We call this MITOSIS yet the mother cell sees to it that her daughters inherit an equal portion of her life. Equity at the cell level can mean equity throughout the world.

...from only four basic molecules called NUCLEOTIDES comes the staggering diversity of the earth measured by the billions in the DNA and assembled into millions of species. Unity begets diversity. There is hope for America.

...natural communities with greater species diversity thrive and are less susceptible to environmental extremes. Can we as a people afford homogenizing our lives?

...flowering plants need their beauty rest too. Without a critical period of darkness the beauty of the flower is lost. We all need a good night's rest.

I can begin to understand what Ralph Waldo Emerson was thinking when he wrote,

> *Nature is an endless combination and repetition of a very few laws. She hums the old well-known air through innumerable variations.*

It is true that nature can be red-in-tooth-and-claw (I think Darwin said that) and so can we. Yet we have a larger capacity to look, listen and love through a liberal education.

A NIGHTMARE

Keith Fowler

Eating a large dinner of sautéed shrimp with lots of onions, green peppers, and mushrooms, then having a piece of pie and ice cream, I went to bed. During the night, I started tossing and turning. Before I knew it, I was in a deep sleep and began dreaming.

I was a small boy of ten years of age, riding on our John Deere tractor with my dad. We were going to a large hay field along a creek called Big Creek. My dad was driving slowly as the road was rough from little usage with no houses within five or six miles. When we arrived at the hay field, I crawled down off the tractor and opened the gate. My dad drove the tractor through the gate into the field. After my dad got off the tractor, we arranged the sickle bar down into position. I was following in his every footstep helping my father so I could learn some of his abilities in hopes of mowing hay some day. My dad got back upon the tractor. He started the mower and headed for the far end of the field, circling, cutting the hay.

As I stayed by the creek, I was playing at being a hunter looking for tracks of animals along the bank where it was soft and sandy. Several tracks appeared in the sand that I could identify. For example, I saw raccoon tracks. I was able to identify these tracks from coon hunting with my father along Big Creek up closer to our home. Also I saw several mink, squirrel, and opossum tracks. As I was walking, all of a sudden I saw new tracks that I had never seen before. The tracks were large. The tracks looked like a cross between a cat and dog, but twice as big. Chills started up my back as I could feel something watching me. As I looked up and across the creek, there it stood on the sandy bank, a large lion. We looked at each other standing about twenty feet apart. As I turned slowly, my feet started moving and sinking in the sand. My dad was at the far end of the field with the tractor running. I knew he wasn't going to hear me if I started yelling. As the lion walked across the creek slowly to me, we looked deep into each other's eyes. With his mouth open wide, as if to swallow me whole, I reached my hand out to him. When we touched, I woke up, and my cat was standing next to me on the bed.

INN WALLS (HAN DUVARLARI)

Frank Nafiz Camlibel
Translated from the Turkish by Ibrahim Atac

Tenacious horses neighed, and leather whipped on them
soon after the spring-carriage started moving.
Sometimes after the wheels jolted,
the caravansaries left behind before my eyes...
I have some feelings of the foreign land in my heart,
from road of Ulukisla to the middle of Anatolia —
the first pain is as first love, and as first separation!
The state of my heart is tender as fire,
the sky, the earth, and the naked trees are pale...
Behind us, high Taurus Mountains are chained.
In front of the mountains, a long winter fades hillside,
then the wheels turn, they groan when they turn...
The breeze was hitting my fingers and
we were riding on a hillside,
everywhere highness and quietness,
the wet lengthening roads, in every turn, were curling.
The curled roads were in a state of sleepiness,
and raising their head, listened to the emptiness,
the clouds were filling the sky, and the wind was cooling.
A wind started to sprinkle slenderly
each peak was leading to emptiness.
At the last point of the uphill, immense flatness.
Finally a meadow appeared.
The roads, as chain, connected us to the horizon,
the foreign land adjoining me to itself,
road, all road, and always road... an immense flatness has no end.
Neither was there a village nor an image of a house around
the last absentee stays vacant of the road,

once in a while a horseman, a couple of pedestrians pass by.
On a destroyed stony road, clinks of
the wheels pass on something to the road,
long roads lay shaking at these clinks...
I let myself go along the clinks, and
lie still in the thin mattress of the spring-carriage.
A sudden shake... I wake up from a long sleep;
the spring-carriage was crossing the winter intently as riding on a smooth road
across from us, caste like, visions of Nigde,
there were sounds of small bells on right side;
camel caravan passed slowly before my eyes,
at one corner of the city seemed a ruined inn.
Everywhere about benighted,
our horses freed, we entered the inn
to find remedy for the curse.
Now assembled, the strangers in caravanserai.
Strangers have gathered from each corner of the land in one place
which suffers absence from home invaded around the fireplace,
all eyes stare to a sudden gleam,
the silence of their feelings was breathtaking;
the kerosene lamp is blackened with soot,
leaving a melancholy reflection on their old faces,
after all, each became a deepened verse
marks on their faces and grief in their eyes...
There was a dark complexioned wall beside my bed,
mixed lines of writings on that very wall;
he has left transitory remarks whoever has slept here,
languid writings and naked drawings...
My eyes, wide open, couldn't part from writings on the wall —
suddenly a few carmine lines got my attention;

this was not like a stanza; it was like four drops of blood.
When I was looking through the lines on the wall, alone,
I met by chance a poet friend;
"I am apart for fourteen years from Kinadag
away from sweet home, away from my love
not collecting a flower from the garden of my love
I have been traveling from one corner to the next."
Underneath a date: March eight thirty seven...
I could not part my eyes from the sign.
Now destiny awaits, do not wait longer my friend!
Now, there are no borders, no army services, and no wars.
Do not feel sad about your youth that has been a traveler.
Your befitted life of foreign land glorifies tomorrow.
The following day, before sunrise, we started to move on.
In a cold morning of March... each breath freezes.
Reflection of daybreak before sun rises, and
the suburb of the town remained behind.
The sun rises and sets behind the clouds;
the cumulus seems from a distance like a mountain...
The caravans pass slowly by us,
old inns established as a tyrant,
we journey on these endless roads and move along
between two mountains' hidden pass
where the cold poyraz[1] scares me to death.
I was lost from excitement after leaving behind the mountain pass.
The places that I left behind can only be understood in the spring;
the land before us is still covered with the snow.
This mountain pass seems to separate the winter from the summer.
Here, the last storm shops the last branch
when the spring-carriage proceeds on at the same speed;

the snow buries all around in an immense darkness;
It was not the snow from the sky; it was death...
Inside of me, longing to arrive at a village
the horseman yelled, "There... Araplibeli."
God help them, those who troubled on the roads.
Reaching a range, we pulled horses into the inn.
Three or four fellows have arrived before us;
they sat cross-legged before the fire,
the crackling of woods enhances the joy of life
where one tells a story of a bandit, the other a fable of a wolf.
When I begin to fall asleep,
black soot leaves flower-like images on the wall.
With black soot from the fire appear these lines:
"If the image of my love pulls my desire,
my strength is not enough to help it.
I am a traveler like dry leaves,
the wind decides my destiny."
In the morning the sky is bright and the horizon is clear.
The spring-carriage heads on the road on a snowy day.
On these very roads that seem endless from one foreign land to the other.
It has been three days since I am departed and it has felt as three seasons.
After a long journey, we are in Incesu.
We, dead tired, are in a sweet sleep in an inn.
Along the sunrise seen dead like dream, I wake up.
I feel great sadness when I see these lines above my bed:
"I am a stranger, people call me Kerem
they took my Asli[2], and forbid me see her.
I am ill; they named it tuberculosis.
I am Satilmis, a son of sheik from Maras."
One can hear an epitaph from his writing.

I am afraid that you did not get back from this foreign land.
You! Son of a sheik from Maras, saint's vow!
Damn your luck if you did not exceed this mountain.
Let alone, you are not alone who couldn't make it;
those high offices positioned you to foreign bandits and wolves.[3]
Our spring-carriage headed to move on the road to Erciyes,
I asked the innkeeper if he knew the son of a sheik from Maras.
He dazzled his eyes on me for a long time
and said:
"He entered the inn alive sometime ago and departed dead."
Everything changed in my shaded eyes.
Our fellow son of a sheik had passed by this very inn...
The bad news of the fellow from Maras set fire to my heart.
A long time has passed since that day.
I am startled every time I come across an inn
because only I know those hidden sorrows in you.
O! Aged roads that connect the villages to the borders
and shed tears for who do not come back.
O! Those inn walls that are filled with pitiable lines.
O! Those inn walls that ache my heart...

[1]Northwest wind.

[2]In the myth, Asli has been parted from her lover Kerem and engaged to the prince, and Kerem searches to find his lover Asli. By searching too long, he loses his sight.

[3]Government institutions place teachers in any schools that need teachers anywhere around the country.

I AM

Jennifer Price

I am a wise old woman
In the body of a child
I am queen of the stars
Here on earth
Giving birth to new ideas
Planting my seeds in the ground
So they can be cultivated
And found by later generations
Who will come to build their lifetimes
On top of our bones

MY MAMA, THE JUNGLE WOMAN

Crystal Duran

My mama, the jungle woman, lived in a Mexican jungle
where rich Spanish kept their plantations of workers and zoos.
They collected animals, they collected people,
they collected men. And they collected money.

My mama, the jungle woman, used to live in a house made of logs
where she filled the cracks with water, mud and leaves.
At night, the moon was full of milk and covered half of the horizon.
At night, packs of deer hammered the earth with their stomping feet.
At night, packs of deer fought and struck their massive antlers
that sounded like the earth was gonna crack, right down the center
and they frightened her out of sleep

My mama, the jungle woman, taught tarascans to read and write.
My mama, the jungle woman, once sold ventilation systems for farmers.
She was given pigs and cows in gratitude.

My mama, the jungle woman, sat on top of rocks and hills that gave black widows
and scorpions warmth.
My mama had bees that made honey, and my grandma sold it in the city.

My Mama and her family used to eat deer, wild boar, porcupines and armadillo.
My mama and my uncle would capture wild turtles and make soup.
My mama said the meat looked white like chicken and was crumbly like beef brain.
My mama said her brother collected rattlesnake rattles and kept them in a chest.
An Indio told him to throw them away because it was a sin.
My mama used to eat lemons from the trees that smelled of sugar and lime.

My mama lived in the jungle for many years, my grandfather left his family there
to take refuge in houses made of earth.
My mama was a writer, but never wrote, because she had no paper and she had
no pens.
My mama wrote me a diary when she was pregnant and I swam in her insides.
My mama used to make jerky out of deer.

My mama used to eat bull testicles that the Spanish gave out.
They owned hundreds of cows and bulls, hundreds of everything.

My mama had a little radio with batteries, and she listened to John Lennon dream
of yesterday.
My mama was a portrait with the clothes she had on.
My mama could be captured in songs of the Mariachi Vargas De Tacalitlan.
My mama's father and brothers would smoke cigars instead of buying vitamins for
the kids.
My mama knew about the outside world through reading women's magazines
brought from the city.
My mama used to want candy and chocolate.
My mama used to sit in coffee shops and chill with bohemians.
My mama used to discuss Marquez and others.
My mama used to shop at Woolworth's before the jungle became her.

My mama, the jungle women, was so far away from her land,
far away from the vendors that walked around with their carts with corn
and mayonnaise,
far away from the vendors on the corner who sold tacos on the street,
far away from the vendors who walked around with fruit and cayenne pepper,
who sprinkled the red powder on cut-up mangos, papayas, watermelon,
far away from where she used to eat shrimp and fish tacos with my dad.
My mama taught my father to eat oysters.
My mama used to dream about Leon, Guanajuato, where she'd dance with my father.
My father the bus driver. They would dance to Magic Moments.
My mama said that was her getaway from the world.
My father and Magic Moments.
My mama lived far far away from her tierra.
La Tierra del Sol.

My mama, the jungle woman.

A PILLOW STORY

Erin McGrath

the ticking of the wall clock grabs me,
its red finger ticking away the seconds of my night here,
myself with my thoughts –
'winter,' you say and you cup the snow in your hand
'winter reminds me of being little
tossing hand-packed snowballs at my dad and how it hurt when he tossed one at me,
and I had his gloves on.
they were too big.' you smile at me.
'too big.'
I look down at the scarf end I was fingering, watching it unravel.
realizing you were doing the same to me.
(and like the scarf, I was pink, hanging, and letting it happen).

it was barely dawn when I saw you last,
your hair a mad mess
and eyes just as wavering (like muddy puddles in winter
that haven't frozen through)
'I have to drive home'
I left you with one last attempt to stir those eyes like coffee,
filling them with rich words or glances or blue, blue morning feelings;
I left you with one last attempt at making myself matter.
baby
I swear on all nightfalls I want you,
and I can't say it in a poem.
I can't tell it in a long glance or brush of the hand,
my sprinkled words would float to the wrong grounds and melt immediately
(like flakes of snow on hot city streets)
they would dance around you lightly, their white skirts brushing your cheek
and avoiding your ear...

my feel is not a december, babe.
it's a sudden change in the sky of an october, crisp air coats you as you walk,
leaves
crumble and crackle under every sidewalk step,
I can say it in a sudden cool shower of rain
making the reds & golds of fall run into each other like a watercolor painting.
my words
would burn and smolder and deliver that autumn nostalgic scent
of smoking leaves and wood
that makes certain ones pause and say 'I remember when...'
and walk a little slower —
for baby, it's not the life that keeps us
it's the memories
this one I want for you, our time, I want you
striding confident in cities
watching cars through windows
hesitating at phone rings
having coffee and early mornings
smoke and drinks and bars and lipstick women
I want you to pause when it comes, this developing capture of me,
and you will say 'I knew her
blue eyes pale skin'
think then of the feelings I never finished, the poem I couldn't end,
the voice that left me mute
think then and leave me,
leave me for that dangling end...
closing your reflection
with the soft click of a door
(the turning of a key echoes in the empty room)
'I love you' I said to the darkness,
'...love you' with tears blurring the streetlights
of another highway home,
'I love you' I said,
and you returned the soft breathing of sleep.

DESTINY'S GRAVITY

Jacob Boyd

At twenty-six, my father painted a self-portrait of funeral shades and harshly intersecting angles. He was five-years tired; his shadows were never allowed to cool. He carried a switchblade. Contrary to my mother's usual silence, she spoke up when he asked her opinion of that painting. She said, "That's not you. That looks devilish." She loved him. The painting quickly became heavenly colored ribbon.

My father left for a while. He was not married to that painting, but thought he should have been and in destroying it had carved away a piece of his marriage to my mother. Neither of them wanted to recognize that, even though the door's loose swing seemed to wave an indefinite goodbye. He took the knife. The house was enormous that night, and my mother endlessly cleaned the already museum-clean rooms. Around four in the morning, my father returned, subdued, and the house shrank with each tear. He had flung the knife into the lagoon in the city park that could be seen from our sloping backyard.

Noon that day was signaled by an ambulance's frantic blue and red from beside the lagoon. A man, somehow larger and more prominent than the ambulance and the lights and the din of the neighborhood's chatter, floated facedown in the lagoon. He looked like he was searching for the knife. He was dead.

I was four years old when that happened and didn't understand why the man would try so hard to return the knife to my father. I didn't know to be glad it was gone. I didn't know that things settle comfortably over time, even if their emergence into the world is rather jarring at first.

The police dragged the lagoon and found the switchblade along with a sundry of other things people wanted to forget; picture frames compressing dissolved photo paper, jewelry boxes swelled at the joints, dead things of wood, metal, and stone. The initials inscribed on the switchblade's hilt were a spot on match with the dead man's. My father didn't try to tell the police different, nor about the painting nor the walk he took. He knew to be glad that it was gone, to let things go on their own. Everything fell into place without a word. That is not to say my father had any part in the man's death; he didn't. The man had simply chosen that place, and the last time I saw the lagoon it made sense. Its green black depths seemed a concentration of something, a proper place to die.

I found all of this out during a conversation I had with my mother the summer before I left for college. It came out slowly through a spell of awkward nostalgia and ended with the quiet tag, "I *do* remember that." I tried to, but couldn't. I guess I was too lost in the music the galaxy makes as it expands and recedes to take notice of such commotion. I think that's why most people don't have any memories from their early, early childhood. Kids are too busy just banging off the cymbals, blowing on the horns, and plucking at all the strings to pay attention to what sound they make, let alone the sounds everyone else makes.

I was going to college to study English and history. My mother thought that was great, but always had a way of saying things as though they weren't from her, just to someone, floating. I believed her. My mother gave me her junior college English notebook when I told her of my interest. In it, I read that Goethe had written a novel entitled *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and scores of readers hung themselves from the same length of rope as Werther's example. Their posthumous letters of explanation cited Werther for their inspiration, for their hastened love. This made history, or at least headlines and magazine columns. After the initial spree of Young Werther suicides, the continual press made their reoccurrence cliché. Nevertheless, the suicides continued, but tapered off over the next few months to a smattering of deaths marking the years in decreasing numbers. Lovers are relentless like that. But no one talks about it anymore. It has found its distant, silent nook and stayed there. Even my mother didn't remember it when I mentioned it to her. When I read those notes then saw the surprise on my mother's face, I wondered how many times it would take the press to run the headline WAR! till it didn't carry the soul of a nation, till nobody believed in the word and would think *it* sad. Those who committed suicide did so because of passion. The papers seemed to suggest that passion is only good for novelty. They are wrong. I wondered how many spelunkers had to be pulled from underground tunnels in the abandoned war field of France who had choked to death on settled chlorine gas to signal war's arbitrary dispassion. Maybe they weren't saying it right in all those headlines. But that's pretty much all one studies when one studies history, the futility of world rallying against its fate and communicating it as progress.

My father didn't know what I was going to school to do, but if he had found out, he'd have said it was great, too. He wouldn't say it right for him, but I'd appreciate it. He had always expressed things best with his hands. His paintings

spoke. He never painted my mother or me. He had moved out several years before I left for school and I could appreciate that. I accepted it, had to. I didn't feel I should, but knew I inevitably would. I accepted that the force I exerted into the world would always coalesce with that which is exerted inward upon me. It was a sad realization for an ill-at-ease kid entering his freshman year of high school to have, but one in which I found a certain kind of peace. I can't say that I could express it like that when I was fifteen. It was more of ambivalence then with the reason for it still collecting like condensation on the inside of my skull through experience.

High school was an awkward transitional phase. I was a boy becoming a manchild becoming a man. I wrote for the school newspaper, which became a Skinner's Box through which I showed that I was growing up and those who read how I thought I was growing up poked at me and said that I wasn't. I copied the format of the previous issues for my letters, which I was instructed to do through study of the archives. But I didn't want to write like all those names whose persons had passed through that school long ago. So during an after-school crunch editing session my senior year, I expressed what I had wanted to say in all the headlines and stories I was forced to write but never given the liberty to speak in. In a small box in the margin, I wrote, "This is an adjustment period. You die." I remained silent about that little stunt, which I managed to slip past the teacher and into print. She was not happy about it; no one was, except for me. I had given all the readers of my column who responded with harsh letters to the editor and gibes in the hallway what they were trying so ineptly to articulate in its plain, ugly simplicity. I told them it didn't matter, and that made them angry. I didn't care.

I didn't, truly, I didn't care. I had begun to forget about the words, until someone actually believed them. Those floating words, detached from a body, from a guiding hand, were for some reason more credible than if an author had claimed them. Without someone to discredit, the words took on the strength of a natural law. No one had written them; they were simply an observation of the way things were. The disembodied theory was able to expand far beyond the surface of any author's flawed skin simply by not giving it an author. I had concentrated something without giving it a container. It was a mistake. My lover read my far-too-simplified theory, confided in me that she read it, and thought it was sad. A week later, she swallowed 31 sleeping pills. The newspaper issue was in her room when her parents found her, but was swiped aside to attend to her body. No one suspected a thing. My poor friend's mother, I do not know if she read my theory, I will probably never know,

swallowed 31 sleeping pills that same night. The pills taken were of different qualities: the frivolously indulgent prescription of my dear friend's mother and the eye-on-savings, over-the-counter bottle of my lover. The last pill taken, 31. Maybe the sleepy seeds had to pack 31 tight in each of their stomachs to take root. Maybe the pills dissolved into their tired blood at corresponding rates. Maybe their wills gave out at the same moment. I haven't written anything since then.

My lover had let all the chaos of the world decide how she thought about herself, how she felt, all the things she couldn't control: time, place, circumstance. I could only keep her happy in short bursts, depending on the weather. My friend's poor mother never believed in chaos. She believed that she should have control over everything. Anything that went wrong she blamed herself for. I haven't written since.

Having been recently so animated, it was divinely disquieting to see their bodies quiet, comfortable, and never coming back. I had forgotten that I knew how to cry. For a person to die on paper is simple. You write, "And the man is opened with a crowbar," and whoever the man is, he is not, from that point on. You have arranged the words in that way. It is all very controlled, very neat. He is dead. I don't believe that I killed my lover or my friend's mother, but I cannot believe that the two separate events occurred without some force acting upon them that compelled them to some point. There is something, I believe, that connected us all, 31, my lover, the day, my friend's mother, and me.

We were mourners for a while. They who knew one or the other, intimately or in passing, with stoicism and tears, and I, who glimpsed how the world settles as it sleeps, with tears, not of regret or of passion, but of sorrow — true sorrow. I cried for the unaccountability of the world. I cried for coincidence. I cried doubly.

The obituary notices for my lover and my friend's mother weren't even next to each other.

Sometimes when I look up into a plate-dark sky, I feel like I'm falling, falling toward every black hole in the universe at once. I imagine that what a black-hole does is extend its force outward into the cosmos and invariably make whatever it touches a part of itself. I think of a great gathering of things into a point, and I pray for the person who knew every one on the obituary page that day. Maybe that person doesn't exist, or it's not that day, but another, but I pray. And while reciting a prayer for that person, I cannot help but think of the switchblade my father carried, Goethe, and the pills.

DEAR JANE

Kendra Svendsen

Hey! How is my favorite and only little sister? I just thought that I would write you and see how things are at home now that I'm not there. How does it feel to be the only child now? I'll be home for Christmas break around the fifteenth or so. Well, since I'm not around to watch over your shoulder and bitch in your ear about everything you do, I thought I'd give a few words to the wise. I mean, since it's my duty and all as a big sis. It's in the handbook, I think. First of all, DON'T do anything that I ever did. Listen to mom and dad because they love you and do know what's best MOST of the time. I know you're in high school now and are pressured to fit in. You don't have to be like everyone else. In fact, don't be like everyone else. Be yourself first and foremost. Never deny what you have inside you, what you feel passionate about, or who you feel you are. It's like Tori Amos said: "You're just an empty cage, girl, if you kill the bird." Remember that beauty has no bounds other than those we put on it ourselves. So what you love and think to be beautiful may be unpopular or alien to others. Just remember that no matter what anyone else thinks, you are God's creature and are therefore beautiful and unique. I know that I'm not there anymore to protect you from these things. You will just have to make a list of people whose ass I need to kick when I come home. Also, boys are BAD. I cannot stress this point enough. Okay, boys aren't bad, but they are just a pain in the ass. You don't need a man to be complete. Relationships are hard and not all rosy feelings and holding hands. Well, the holding hands thing better be all you are doing. Ha Ha! No dating until you are thirty, okay? Just trust me on this one when I say that getting close to a guy can be harder on you than you think. Remember that you body is sacred and you never get a second chance at your first time. So, decide on your path wisely (or I'll break your...no wait...HIS legs). Whoever he may be. When you do find a man and get all mushy to the point that you start thinking that maybe he is the one, try to remember that you have a long life ahead of you. Make sure that you respect the guy you are with and not simply like his cute ass. Too many people throw around the word love and don't really know what it means. You can be close to a person and not be in love with him. Also, too many people are ready to say that they are with the one when they haven't even been out in the world much to know

what they want out of life. I see kids engaged in high school way too often. Find out what you want to be and what you want your life to turn out like before you get weighted down with a husband and/or kids. That is a wonderful aspect. Don't get me wrong. It's just that there are too many things out there to see and experience to miss because of something that you can wait to have. Don't rush yourself. It will come in time and when you are ready. Always "suck the marrow out of life." It's one of the best things in the world to go out and experience nature and all that it has to offer. Go see Europe, Africa, Australia, and everywhere in between. Hell, when you graduate, we will go together. You and I backpacking across the world. Just remember that you have a lot of time. Go to a playground every once in a while and remind yourself that you're young. Plus, you can never be too big to have fun at a playground. Ha! Oh, about sex; it's not all it's cracked up to be, sweetie. I firmly tell you that as your older sister I forbid you to have sex, but as one female to another, it's not something you want to rush into. And do you remember that question that you asked me before about size? It doesn't matter. You don't need to go find out for yourself. Just take my word on it. Anyway, I remember what it was like at fourteen and fifteen. You are not invincible either. Do me a favor and don't do anything too stupid, okay? Remember Kelly who decided that it was fun to play with trains? He didn't have much fun when one hit him. He was your age when that happened or thereabouts. I know it must be boring in a little nowhere town, but find better things to do with your time then that kind of stupid shit. Don't get me wrong though. It's fun to take some risks here and there and to take chances, but choose them better than that. I know I did some crazy shit in my days. Hell, I still do. You need to have spice in your life. Otherwise, you end up like mom who never did anything wrong in her entire life. Or maybe that's just how she makes it look. Puritan Paula is not what I would call a cool nickname. Now I love mom, but you will end up unfulfilled if you take her path: a housewife who longs for her dreams and tries to live vicariously through her kids while she has no memories of real fun to keep her sane. And another thing — God loves you. You are always in His watch even when you do stupid shit like me. I know I haven't been the perfect example of Christianity, but believe me when I say that He is there to kick you in the ass when you need it as well as to help you up when you fall. I know. Try to pray about anything that comes to mind.

Even if it's to find your lost car keys. Just don't lose touch with Him, or Her as the case may be! Ha Ha! Well, sis, I guess I've given you all the advice that I can think of at the moment. Just remember that I love you and will always be here for you whether you listen to me or not and whether you succeed or fail. Oh, one last thing — never write your initials plus someone else's on a bridge or wall because it's doomed once you do that. It's like in the rule book or something.

Marlene

Dear Marlene,

Guess what? I get to go to homecoming! A senior guy asked me. Mom and dad don't quite like the fact that he's seventeen, but it will be so cool. And I know right now what you are thinking. No, he doesn't simply want a piece. I know he's older and more experienced and blah blah blah. I think you should know that even though you aren't here, I still hear your voice in my ear about most things that I do. I may not listen, but I hear it. Ha Ha! Also, I'm not planning on playing with any trains because I'm not that stupid. Give me some credit. I wore my new plaid thrift store pants to school the other day. So your sense of style has worn off on me. I really did get a lot from your letter. In fact, I'm writing this as I sit on top of the jungle gym at the elementary school. I prayed last night. I prayed for you. I hope you can take your own advice and follow your dreams. Don't worry though because I'll be here to throw your advice right back at you, sister dear. When I can, I will be looking over your shoulder and bitching in your ear to keep you in line. Just because I'm young doesn't mean that I can't have a few pearls of wisdom as well. I mean we come from the same stock, so I can be bossy and know it all too. Ha Ha! Well, gotta run because I'm going out with Monica tonight and we are going to look for dresses together. I love you, sis. You just remember that I will be here when you succeed or fail as well. I know that you need someone to support you, and it's like my job to give that. It's like in the little sister handbook or something :-)

Much love,

Jane

ANGEL IN A SHORT SKIRT

Jacob Boyd

She was my angel in a short skirt,
a thrift store maiden on the midnight train
with the kind of beauty one must be inoculated to.
Those shots come on Tuesday,
prior to the popularly acclaimed hump-day,
thank God,
for God was watching closely.
Lightning flashed,
God took his surveillance photos,
and I'm embarrassed.
With a photographic memory He can forgive nothing.
For christsake,
I'm afraid of the sound of the shy's shutter,
but Christ wasn't present for that photo op.
And while rubbing the dirt from between my wrists and palms
to appear presentable to my
lovely,
carnal
Thyphoid Mary
I gave myself my own raw stigmata to worry about.

BLIND DATE

Sonja E. Wiechee-Kamen

Curiosity? Romance? Mystery? After many weeks of phone tag and numerous conversations my interest was peaked like Mt. Everest. A man of ten years my elder sparked an intense desire in me that I was so completely unaware of. I was caught totally off my guard until this stranger crossed my path like a black cat in the dead of night. I swore to ward off men forever! But this voice, this incredibly enveloping and sensuous stranger's voice, seduced me like nothing I had ever felt before. I should have stuck to the old cliché — if it's too good to be true it probably is. Now enter my nightmare!

Many weeks had passed, and my anticipation was driving me insane. The night, the supposedly glorious night, had finally arrived like the Grim Reaper scratching at my door. The night to end my years of frozen dinners and movies in front of the TV cuddled with nothing but a raggedy old scratchy blanket and a tub of ice-cold rocky road. This stranger was to bring a life of wonderful bliss and happy memories. I was to forever keep my secret thoughts of these enchanted evenings in my memoirs. I spent what felt like a lifetime preparing for my mysterious suitor. As I spent my time and my hard-earned dollars preparing for my soulmate, my thoughts turned to a full life with many children and a husband who would be the envy of everyone, even royalty. But I think he was the devil himself, and not a very good disguise, I might add.

My hours I spent at the beauty salon waxing, coloring, cutting, polishing and doing the 1001 other things all women do to disillusion our men. From there it was off to the boutique. I had to have the dress of a lifetime. I swear you would think I was going to the Academy Awards. This dress had to be everything. I was looking for sexy yet not too revealing. It really is much better to leave something to the imagination. I wish I had left him to mine. Should it be black and silky or maybe red and seductive? Finally! Ah yes, there it was right in front of me, calling to me. I think I even heard my name. It was perfect. Innocent, but not motherly. It was midnight blue. Believe me, you could get lost in the depth of its color. The length was perfect, showing just enough to tease. I slipped into this exotic piece of material and was suddenly somewhere else. It produced exactly the right curves and could lure even the strongest willed person into my world.

Well, I was ready, more than ready. I waited all my life for this very single moment. I was thinking candlelight dinner for two, champagne and roses, quiet dancing to the sounds of jazz, followed by a brandy and some tantalizing chat by the warmth of the oversized brick fireplace that sits adjacent to the Jacuzzi we were warming ourselves in. This would be a night that would burn in my mind forever. My knight in shining armor would sweep me off my feet like Cinderella at the ball.

GUESS AGAIN!

This short, and I mean shorter than me, short pudgy man tried to ring the bell, but he couldn't reach it. So he knocked instead. Filled with anxiety and anticipation, I raced to the door. Oh my gosh, I thought it was a delivery or something! This little man with painted-on hair (he had more sticking out the back of his shirt than on his head) appeared before me. He was in some kind of psychedelic seventies disco shirt. This creature was adorned with more chains than Mr. T. To complete his hideous look, he slid his dough-like belly into puke green polyester pants. He reminded me of a moldy sausage link. He finished with fake alligator-skin boots with silver chains like Mr. Cowboy. More like a rodeo clown, I thought. I suddenly was overcome with the desire to throw up.

He escorted me to his cream-and-rust-colored pick up truck. The rust had overcome it so that it looked like a piece of Swiss cheese sitting in my drive. I didn't think that it could get worse, but as I was walking behind him, the sweat was shooting off him like bullets puncturing my dress, forever scarring it with stains. Then let's talk about the smell. I was not to sure if it was him or the truck, but try holding your breath for twenty-five minutes because (what a surprise!) the windows did not roll down. This nauseating smell was a cross between a decaying rodent and a pile of manure.

Well, we finally arrived at the...bowlerama. Woohoo! He then had to get a screwdriver to pry my hundred dollar shoes off the goopy floor. He so proudly escorted me into this building that should have been condemned. I politely declined the beef jerky and can of Old Milwaukee that he offered. I thought HOW DELIGHTFUL! I can't wait to meet the rest of the gang. These people would have made the pigs on the farm look like a king. I mean no teeth, raunchy smelling, slimy toad. I was...I really was in Hell! At this point, he was planning our hoedown wedding and naming our fifteen children. Gross! Let me out I was screaming to myself! Just being around these people made me feel like I needed to get a rabies shot.

After I finally could not take anymore, I excused myself to the ladies' room, which is a whole other story. I slung my purse across my body and hoisted myself up to the tiny hole in the wall. I managed to get myself to the outside world. One of my shoes slipped off and my dress ripped right down the front on my way out. I did not care though because I was FREE! I turned once to look back and saw nothing but a dark haze covering the building almost like a mushroom cloud. I ran as fast as I could and hitched a ride back to the civilization. He tried to call me and sent me cards. Flower deliveries were an everyday event. It looked like a floral shop in my house. I never acknowledged his existence after that night. He was too stupid to get the message. He kept stalking me until I had no choice but to change my name and leave town never to be seen again! This was the third strike for me as far as blind dates go. Believe me, everything you ever heard about them is quite true. I learned later that he parked himself in front of my old house and died there of old age.

THE TEST

Ryan Ruffatti

Oh, boy. First question: In the story, what was the name of the...the sun is a mass of incandescent mass, a giant nuclear furnace. Damned song. Back to the question. In the sun is hot. The sun is not a place where we could – Stop! This test is important. I need to think about the story that I *did* read and not some idiotic song! Now, focus. In the story, what was the name of the man who knows about a mass of incandescent gas...

"Aaarrrrrgggghhh!"

That felt good. Um...Why is everyone looking at me? Was that out loud? Oh God, I think it was. The class does not seem happy. Well, that stoned guy in the back of class does, but he always looks that way. I should do something.

"Uh...Sorry, everyone."

There, that should do it. That was embarrassing. Back to the test. Focus. Think. You can do this. Question One: I'm only on question one? I have fourteen more to go after I finish this one and that includes two essay questions. Well, I'm not getting anywhere preaching to myself. I need to take this test.

In the story, what was the name of the man who knew about the murders?

John.

Woo-hoo!! I answered a question without drifting into some song. Oh, yeah! Have a party. It's your birthday...Wait that's a song. I want to avoid songs. Songs are evil. Songs keep you from the test. This isn't really helping either. But I got that damned song incandescent gas song out of my head! Why? Because I'm blue da ba dee, da ba di.

Second Question: Who has a blue house and a blue window? No! Another song! At least, it's a different song. It can't be that bad dee, da ba di.

Block the song out. You can do it. Block it out. I can do it. I can have a blue house with a blue window. Argh! Question! Who was responsible for making me blue? da ba dee, da ba di. I'm blue. da ba dee, da ba di.

"...blue, da ba dee, da ba - "

OK. Pop quiz. Why is everyone looking at me again? Guessing by the tapping of my pencil, I've begun to sing the song out loud and passed the virus on the other member of class.

"Um...catchy song?"

Oh, that was intelligent. Speaking of intelligent, I'm taking a test in which I am at question two!

Who was responsible for the murders? Why?

Gina and Terri because she's so blue da ba dee. With her blue house and her blue window.

My God. I don't believe I just wrote that! I wrote scat syllables down as an answer on a test. Man, I need help! I'll leave it and take what I can get and move on to the next question.

Why was Gina worried about...people are putting their pens and pencils down. Oh, God. I'm out of time, and I answered two questions. One of which I answered in scat. I should say a little prayer for myself before I turn in my test.

"Oh may the Lord protect all of the tests, but this one. May He make sure it ends up in a blender, in a rain puddle, or wind up completely unreadable...If He were not to find it within His great wisdom to grant this, may the teacher like scat music."

MOTHERHOOD

Stacey Murphy

I feel a sharp prick at the inside of my elbow, and then a slow warming sensation spreads from there.

"The doctor will be with you in about fifteen minutes. Try to relax in the meantime," the nurse says while she massages the place where she withdrew the needle. She throws away the syringe and disappears out the door.

Try to relax. I shift in my paper gown and stare at the ceiling, studying the light fixture above. It reminds me of the old metal ice-cube trays we had when I was little. The lines start to become a little blurred, start slanting and quivering. Must be the Valium taking effect.

The drug-induced warmth doesn't last long. I'm cold. Of course, this steel table doesn't help much. My body starts to feel thick, slabbed onto the table. My legs are bent over the end and involuntarily swing a little. A chilling draft blows from under the door and moves past my bare feet. The cardboard slippers I had on earlier have since fallen to the floor. I wish I had my socks on. Apparently I could've left them on — the other women did. I followed the nurses' orders and placed them inside a plastic crate with the rest of my clothes. Wish I had on my fuzzy sweatsuit instead of the paper dress she insisted I wear. And what was I supposed to do with the plastic belt? Yeah, tie it around my waist and I'm ready for the runway. The other women knew to tailor their little outfits. The must have done this before. Everyone else had her socks on. Some even left their bras and underwear on. Others wore two gowns to keep covered. I foolishly followed directions, leaving myself more vulnerable. I hate being cold.

A dull buzzing begins to sound. Must be the room across the hall. Or maybe the refrigeration unit kicking in.

Relax, relax, I tell myself over and over again, as if simply saying the word would help. No, knowing that I have to relax makes it more difficult. Think happy thoughts. I focus on Susan's happy chatting on the drive up this morning. She tried to tell me about some art project she was working on for school. It's some sort of portrait made of all these tiny little pencil dots — no straight lines. She's really

excited about it, but I had a hard time with the concept. She called the technique something with a "p." Printerly, Poking. Pointillism, I think.

I haven't an artistic bone in my body, I'm always telling her. She has some theory about how we all have the ability because we all grew up with coloring books and crayons. Not me. My mind continues to wander through slurred memories of childhood: Barbie dolls, tea sets, Easy Bake ovens. My favorite toy was a plastic kitchen set. There was a little stove with its own little burners. On top of one burner was decal of a frying pay with bacon in it. The refrigerator had little butterfly magnets on the door. There was even a little sink where I was supposed to wash the little plastic cups and forks. I used it as a tub for my dolls.

I let my mind sink deeper into childhood when life was all toy kitchen sets and dolls. That, too, changed though. My pretend world of play house transformed into reality.

I remember tiptoeing up the stairs to peek into my parent's bedroom. My father sat on the edge of the bed and talked quietly into the phone. On the other side of the bed lay my mother, naked except for the sheet draped over one leg. My first reaction was to giggle at her nakedness. Her freckled skin sagged around her body, almost pooling onto the bed beneath her. Pink, thick scars slashed across her chest where breasts once were. She slit her eyes open for a moment, but let them fall shut again.

I walked quietly back downstairs to watch "The Brady Bunch" with my sister. April sat on the floor amidst paper dolls. She was too close to the television. "Scoot back, Ape. You'll hurt your eyes," I told her. I sat on the couch and watched her play rather than watch the television.

A few moments later Daddy called me and April upstairs.

"Say good-bye to your mother, girls," he said. "She's going back to the hospital in a few minutes."

By now my mother was awkwardly wearing a flowered, summer nightgown. The strap was falling of one shoulder and the neck was stretched open. The sheet covered her body from the waist down.

I looked up at Daddy, and he nodded for me to go on. I leaned over the bed and timidly kissed her cheek, not sure exactly how I was supposed to act. There was no response from the weak body under my mouth. "Get well soon" was the only thing I could think to say.

April pushed me aside for her turn. She was still clutching a paper Holly Hobbie. Holly's paper pinafore had fallen on to the carpet. April momentarily stopped chewing her gum to kiss Mom. "Get well," she repeated.

Later that night, April came across the hall into my room. Without turning on the light she walked over to my bed and crawled in with me. I slept carefully that night, I remember, trying to give my sister enough room in the twin bed we shared. April insisted on kicking off blankets. She slept with an arm crooked next to her head, her hand curled into a loose fist. Her pink Strawberry Shortcake nightgown was half twisted around her body. Headlights from passing cars moved like spotlights across the bedroom walls. It was cold then, too.

The door swings open and the nurse enters again. "How are you feeling, Lily?"

"A little woozy." My words sound muffled even to me.

"Dr. Cassidy will be just a few more minutes." She swings out the stirrups from the foot of the table and places my naked heels into them. She starts mumbling about an episode of the Oprah show she saw earlier in the week, but I tune her words out. I try to concentrate on the hospital jacket she's wearing. It has all these pastel-colored ribbon designs swirling in some strange dance. The pink and blue and yellow squiggles make too much sense to me so I turn back to the ceiling.

A scrub-clad man suddenly obscures my view of the ice-cube tray. "Hello, Lily. We're going to start now." I hear a stool wheel from the corner of the room. The doctor leaves my view to take his place between the stirrups.

The nurse takes my right hand into both of hers. "You're going to feel a little pressure. Dr. Cassidy will numb your cervix so he can dilate it. Just relax and breathe deep."

A sharp pinch comes from deep inside my belly. The nurse and doctor start a private dialogue I choose to ignore. Relax, relax. I start counting the ice cubes in the tray. One, two, three. Buzzing noises start up again, interrupting my counting.

"Lily, will you help your sister get dressed?" Daddy called out to me from the hallway. He was standing in front of the full-length mirror knotting his tie. I walked

across the hall dragging my feet into April's room. She sat on her bed in her slip and tights.

"Don't wanna go." She pouted, arms folded. She looked up at me and stuck out her boo-boo lip.

"You get to wear the pink dress. It twirls," I said, attempting to bribe her. That dress was her favorite.

"Don't wanna wear no pink dress. It's your old dress. Wanna new one. Can't Mommy buy me a new one?" Eventually she pulled the dress over her head, but she caught the hem on the waist of her tights. She dutifully walked over to me to finish zipping the back, untuck the hem, and tie the sash.

"Why we gotta go to church? It's not church day. Do I gotta to Sunday school, too?" April started to stick out boo-boo lip again.

"Not today. We gotta say good-bye to Mommy."

The nurse wheels me out of the operating room and into the hallway. Together we make seemingly endless rights and lifts, up ramps and down, through the heart of the building. Finally, we push through double doors into a brightly lit room filled with narrow beds. The room resembles pictures of the orphanage in *Annie*. I'm escorted to an empty bed at the far side of the room. The nurse parks the chair and helps me into the bed.

"If you lie on your side, it'll help the cramping," the nurse says. Immediately, I draw my knees to my chest and roll to one side. I want to close my eyes, but the room spins more when I do. "Here," the nurse says as she hands me a bulky Maxi Pad. I stare blankly back at her, not sure of what to do with it. "You'll bleed all over if you don't use it." I place the pad between my lets, still confused.

I roll over to my other side. There's a black women in the bed next to mine. She too is balled up, but her face isn't wincing in pain. Instead, she's peaceful. Her hands are together, holding her head just slightly off the pillow. Her hair is pulled back tightly into a bulky bun on top of her head. Her face is a little pudgy, but it glows. The whites of her eyes stand out. She notices me studying her face and smiles wide.

"How ya' feelin'?" she asks in a thick southern accent.

"I'm OK."

She smiles at me reassuringly again. The tiny etchings around her eyes deepen when she smile.

"You'll be fine, darlin'. I promise you that. The worst is over, so now you can just relax."

Another nurse, wearing the same swirling jacket, comes by and reads the chart hanging from her bed frame.

"Louise, I want you to go ahead and sit up slowly. If you start to feel dizzy, just lie back down again. All your belongings are on the shelf next to the door. You can use this bathroom to get dressed. OK? Remember, two weeks from now you'll need to return for a check up."

"All right. Thank you." Louise smiles back at her, smiles with my smile. She slowly sits up and swings her feet off the bed. I notice she's wearing thick wool socks. "You take care of yourself now, darlin', and everything will be just fine."

She carefully stands up, holding one arm out to steady herself. She begins to make her way to the shelf unit on the wall. She pulls down a red plastic basket and goes into the bathroom.

I look back at the now empty bed beside mine. The sheets are wrinkled and twisted. There's a divot where Louise's body impressioned the bed. I listen to the noises coming from the bathroom: paper (gown?) crinkling loudly, water running, hand dryer blowing. The door knob jiggles a bit and the door creaks open, but I don't take my eyes off the bed next to me.

My eyes begin to go hazy with fatigue. My body gives up the fight with sleep.

"Lily, you are free to go anytime you feel up to it," a nurse tells me. "We'll see you in two weeks." I open my eyes to the bright fluorescent room. Still a little drugged, I am careful to sit up slowly. After the room stops spinning, I get up and walk over to the shelves to find my plastic crate full of clothes. I move slowly toward the bathroom to get dressed.

After changing back into my sweatsuit, I walk out to the waiting room to meet Susan. She looks up from an issue of *Vogue* and smiles gently at me. She gathers up her coat and purse and walks up to me.

"You OK?"

"Yeah, I'm OK."

"Let's get outta here. I'm starving."

We walk quietly down out of the office and down to the parking garage where her little blue Chevette awaits. She unlocks my side of the door first and waits until I'm settled into my seat before going to the driver's side.

"Can you eat anything? I'll treat you to Taco Hell." She drives the car out of the parking garage and heads for the interstate. "Do you wanna talk 'bout it?" Susan asks while looking ahead at the highway

"There's nothing much to say."

Susan contemplates a minute. "Did it hurt?"

"A little. It wasn't that bad."

"So what now?"

"Just gotta go back in a couple weeks for a checkup. Then I'm finished."

"Huh." Susan's standard answer when she didn't know where else to go with the conversation.

She switches on the radio and fumbles with the dial, eventually settling on the classic-rock station. "Margaritaville" fills the car. Susan sings along off-key, her head bobbing a bit, swinging her auburn curls in beat with the music. We drive like that for a while. Susan sings along with the radio, and I squint out the window, focusing my eyes on the barely-budding trees and bushes lining the highway.

Finally, she looks away from the highway and over at me, raising her eyebrows to survey my condition. She smiles again, a little more boldly this time. "Where is your seat belt, young lady?" she asks, mimicking my own lecture given to her so many times. I look up at her, relaxing more and more with each of her attempts to make me laugh.

"Seriously," she continues. "Buckle up, baby!" She sees the frown creep across my face. "Shit — sorry," she says barely under her breath.

"It's OK," I say as I reach to fasten the belt.

WHAT ARISTOTLE ONCE SAID

Bill Yarrow

a poet wrote:
    when the axe
    came into the forest
    the trees said,
    "the handle is one of us"

you want to be a poet?
go, give blood
let them prick your finger
sit in the leather chair
watch what's on TV
squeeze the little ball
fill up the bag
think about the first time you saw an axe
the first time you held an axe
the first time you sharpened an axe
about how confused you were
when you were told what Aristotle once said:
    "poetry is an axe"

poetry is an axe?
then the handle is one of us

THE THREE CYPRESSES

Nazim Hikmet
Translated from the Turkish by Ibrahim Atac

There were three cypresses before my house.

The three cypresses.

The cypresses swayed in the wind.

The three cypresses.

Their roots in the ground, their heads among the stars.

The three cypresses.

The cypresses, in the wind, swayed.

The three cypresses.

One night an enemy trod into my house.

The three cypresses.

I was killed in my bed.

The three cypresses.

The cypresses were cut from the ground.

The three cypresses.

Neither their roots in the ground nor their heads among the stars.

The three cypresses.

The cypresses no longer swayed in the wind.

The three cypresses.

The cypresses were cut and lay in a marble fireplace.

The three cypresses.

Enlightening a bloody axe.

The three cypresses.

VILLANELLE

Ted Thompson

Dancers turn stately, still at the ball
The magic of music plays
Despite tower's fall.

Stoically martyrs stand 'gainst the wall
Dreaming the end of days
While dancers turn stately, still at the ball.

Lovers' heels echo far down the hall
Eyes lock in longing gaze
Despite tower's fall.

Vengeance brings vinegar, hated brings gall
And hearts lost in marble maze
While dancers turn stately, still at the ball.

As lyres and tabors sound forth the lush call,
The makers wear still the garlands of bay
Despite tower's fall.

Although madmen and zealots do often appall
And the gold of life's beauty fades often to gray,
The dancers turn stately, still at the ball
Despite tower's fall.

Wordeater is the biannual literary/arts magazine of Joliet Junior College.

It accepts submissions from current and former students and faculty.

It is looking for original creative work of any kind, including poetry, plays, short fiction, translations, personal or literary essays, interviews, autobiographical prose, photography, and art.

Please submit work to W. Yarrow (English/Foreigh Language Department, mailbox C-1050). Put your name, address, and telephone number on an envelope or separate cover, but not on the work itself. Only artwork/photography will be returned. Please include a SASE.

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1st and 2nd place monetary awards for prose, poetry, and artwork are given for student work judged the best in the current issue by an outside judge.

Issue No. 109

The John Stobart Award for Prose
1st Place: Ryan Ruffatti for "The Test"
2nd Place: Bonnie Kodrick for "Charlie's Life"

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1st Place: Erin McGrath for "A Pillow Story"
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1st Place: Joe Jensen for front cover
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*John Stobart was the founder and guiding light of **Wordeater**. As faculty sponsor, he shepherded it through 106 issues. He retired from Joliet Junior College's English/Foreign Language Department in 1999.

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